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ABSTRACT

As institutional research or outcome assessment becomes more commonplace in institutions of higher education, the issue of what opportunities this presents to researchers desiring to move past relatively routine reporting into the more creative aspects of the profession becomes more prominent. Several possible roles emerge as a result of the assessment implementation process: Implementation Team Coordinator; Institutional Planner; Departmental Activity Facilitator; and Assessment Data Gatherer. Each role varies in its attractiveness in assisting professional development and what is usually expected from individuals within these roles. Of particular interest are the two most common roles the institutional researcher will be asked to play in terms of institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment: the Assessment Data-Gatherer Role and the Institutional Planner Role. Also included are two assessment matrixes: one is an example of an assessment plan for an accounting department and the other is a matrix showing whose responsibility it is to provide data, what type of data, and for which departments or services. Contains 19 references. (GLR)

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The second, now common, context within which implementation of institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment takes place is a state mandate for such activity. The impetus for such actions on the part of governors, legislatures, and state governing boards can be traced to deliberations which took place in the mid-1980s and which ultimately were reflected in the National Governors' Association report, *Time for Results—1991 Report on Education* (1986). The injunctions contained in that document have been followed in many states, and a soon-to-be-published report from the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) indicates that 84% of state legislatures and/or governing boards have taken one action or another regarding implementation of outcomes assessment and institutional effectiveness (States, 1990, p. 2). State mandates take a variety of forms, ranging from the relatively general injunctions contained in the Virginia Assessment Plan (Virginia General Assembly, 1987) to the far more prescriptive set of requirements based upon recent legislation in South Carolina (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 1989). Depending upon their nature, state mandates may have a substantial impact upon the role of the institutional research component within implementation on the campus.

Among the more common contexts for assessment operations is a campus regional accrediting effort. While the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is frequently identified as having the most rigorous requirements regarding implementation of institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1987), all regional accrediting associations, since 1986, have been required by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) to:

1. Sharpen statements of mission and objectives to identify intended educational outcomes
2. Develop additional effective means of assessing learning outcomes and results
3. Use the self-evaluation and peer-review processes of accreditation as an integral part of ongoing planning and institutional or programmatic change.

Further, these mandates have been underscored by the Federal Government's involvement and the directive that accredited institutions emphasize "educational effectiveness" (U.S. Department of Education, 1988).

Each of these contexts for implementation (pure student outcomes, state mandate, accreditation/institutional effectiveness) has a considerable impact upon the role of the institutional research component as well as the overall institutional reaction. It should also be acknowledged that some institutions were doing outcome assessments even before it became a national movement. Those institutions did so because they felt it was the right thing to do. In fact, some people believe that assessment efforts will have significant impact on program development and be of lasting value only if driven by internal concerns.

Roles within Implementation of Institutional Effectiveness

Institutions implementing institutional effectiveness and student outcomes assessment frequently find that several roles emerge as a result of the implementation process: Implementation Team Coordinator, Institutional Planner, Departmental Activity Facilitator, and Assessment Data Gatherer (Figure 1).

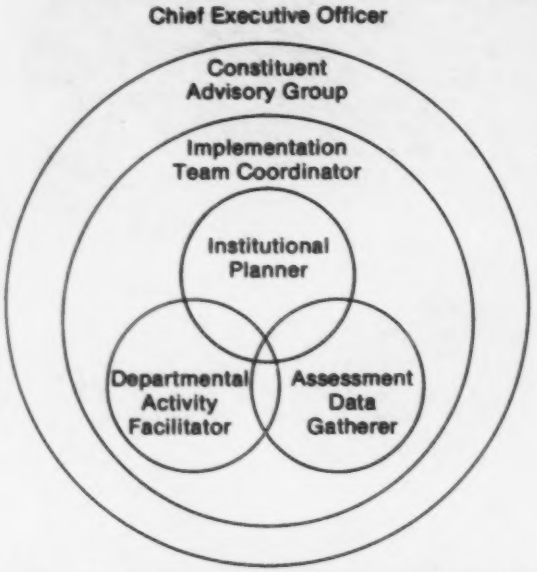

Figure 1. The institutional effectiveness implementation team.

Probably the greatest opportunity for professional growth by institutional researchers aspiring to move into more general institutional administration is to assume the role of overall implementation team coordinator. Because implementation is one of those activities (unlike registration, payroll, course scheduling, etc.) which can be delayed, campuses find it necessary to appoint an individual (as opposed to a committee) responsible for seeing that implementation takes place in a timely fashion. It is not unusual for an institutional research officer, if widely respected on the campus, to be identified to fulfill such duties.

The role of institutional planner is also one which is frequently filled by an individual heading the unit which may be titled "institutional research and planning" on the campus. It is important to understand that the type of planning required in institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment is different than financially oriented budget planning.

The third role, departmental activity facilitator, is the least likely to be filled by an institutional research professional. This role necessitates a direct working relationship with departmental faculty in order to explain the requirements of institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment and facilitate faculty efforts. Usually this role is filled by an academic administrator or a member of the faculty.

At the very least, the institutional research components on campuses implementing institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment can expect to receive the role of assessment data gatherer. This role involves the design of the assessment process and frequently the logistical support for the means of assessment implemented. Because this role requires the greatest level of technical expertise and the most physical work, and is most likely to be the "lightening rod" drawing the greatest amount of controversy or criticism, it is a role which is usually "ours to keep."

In addition to identifying the context within which institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment are to be implemented on the campus, the institutional researcher must ascertain which of the relatively distinct roles described he or she is being asked to fill. On some campuses, there will be a more or less open or "go for it" situation with regard to the overall coordination of the implementation team. On other campuses, individuals other than the institutional research officer will be identified to play the roles of implementation team coordinator or institutional planner. In general (depending upon the professional development goals of the institutional research officer), there is little to be lost in seeking as great a role in implementation as possible. The nature of the role granted to the institutional research officer by the campus will ultimately be determined by the existing perception of that individual on the campus, the interest of others in assuming these roles, and any external restraints imposed on the institution.

In addition to making the decision regarding what role to assume, or what role the institutional researcher is expected to take, there are different implications that can arise based upon whether the assessment activities are handled through the expansion of the current focus of the institutional research component or a new institutional research component is established strictly for the purpose of institutional effectiveness. There are advantages and disadvantages, including cost and staffing considerations, in both arrangements. For a comprehensive look at this topic, consult the referenced Nichols and Wolff *New Directions* chapter (1990).

The institutional research component's involvement in the implementation of institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment has certain organizational implications, based primarily on its organizational reporting relationship. If the implementation involves a broad program of planning and assessment activities in all academic and administrative departments, then there is merit in having the institutional research component in the office of the chief executive officer of the institution. If the institution as a whole, and thus the institutional research component, focuses only on developing a student outcomes orientation, then it is advisable that a direct organizational relationship exist between the institutional research component and the chief academic officer of the institution. With respect to the institutional research component having an amenable working relationship with the faculty, Ewell and Lisensky (1988) point out that such a close relationship is most likely to exist when the component reports directly to the chief academic officer.

The two most common roles that the institutional research officer will be asked to play in terms of institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment are that of assessment data gatherer and institutional planner. Following are detailed discussions of the two roles.

The Assessment Data-Gatherer Role

Understanding the context within which the institutional research officer will be asked to implement the assessment data-gatherer role is as important as understanding the overall context within which institutional effectiveness is implemented. With what external constraints is the institutional research officer faced? In the case of relatively pure student outcomes assessment, no external constraints are imposed. In the case of responding to an external mandate from a state legislature or governing board, specific means of assessment and, potentially, even instruments will have been prescribed, and these will form the basis for the overall assessment effort. In the case of assessment of institutional effectiveness, relatively little specification as to means of assessment is identified. However, the assessment process will need to be structured around the statements of expected departmental/program results established in conjunction with the institution's statement of purpose.

Implementation of the assessment data-gatherer role is contingent upon a clear understanding between the institutional research officer and his or her supervisor regarding their joint expectations concerning the assessment effort. It is necessary that this clear understanding be arrived at concerning the relative importance of assessment activities in light of overall requirements of the institutional research component to protect the institutional researcher from various competing demands for services.

Once the context within which data relative to assessment will be gathered is identified, then the institutional researcher can turn his or her attention to what means of assessment will be utilized. These include cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral means of assessment which are further identified and explained in a number of other publications devoted to this purpose. These include those by Pike (1988) and Harris (1985). In this regard, however, the major internal task for the institutional researcher charged as the assessment data gatherer is to identify existing assessment processes and those which might potentially be utilized at the institution.

One of the relatively few certainties regarding assessment is that all institutions implementing institutional effectiveness or student outcomes assessment have been surprised to learn the level of assessment activities already taking place on their campuses in a somewhat unsystematic, but nonetheless constructive, fashion. Conducting an inventory of current assessment activities on the campus will identify these existing means of assessment while, at the same time, it will illustrate to the campus the amount which faculty have been doing on their own for some period of time.

In addition to this inventory of existing means of assessment on the campus, it will be necessary for the institutional researcher to conduct an inventory of standardized means of assessment available from various vendors. This inventory describes what means could be made available on the campus in a short period of time. In the case of both types of standardized means of assessment (attitudinal or cognitive), the institutional researcher must arrive at a conclusion relative to whether it is best to adopt such a standardized measure or to construct locally an institution-specific instrument, a trend which is increasing, according to the El-Khawas study (1989).

There are a number of pros and cons to consider when deciding whether to use standardized or localized means of assessment. Here, standardized refers to instruments made available to the institution by off-campus vendors, and localized applies to those instruments which are designed by faculty or staff affiliated with the institution. Peter Ewell, in a 1987 *New Directions* chapter, identified a general set of pros and cons with

regard to the use of standardized and localized assessment measurements:

Pros of Standardized Instruments

1. Relatively easy to administer
2. Acceptable in terms of faculty and staff time invested
3. Generally less open to charges of subjectivity and bias
4. Nationally normed for comparisons across institutions
5. Validity and reliability established
6. Processing and reporting services available.

Cons of Standardized Instruments

1. May not reflect the content of a specific institution's curriculum
2. Scores may not be meaningful for institutional assessment
3. Normative comparison scores may be inappropriate for curriculum evaluation
4. May be expensive to purchase and score.

Pros of Localized Instruments

1. Instrument content reflects curriculum
2. Suitable for additional analysis of results
3. Amenable to a variety of formats (problem solving, essay, etc.)
4. Considered "legitimate" by faculty (ownership).

Cons of Localized Instruments

1. Less external credibility
2. Validity and reliability data lacking
3. Lack of normative data for comparisons
4. Can be costly to produce
5. Scoring of writing samples time consuming and difficult.

Once the aforementioned pros and cons have been considered and the decision of whether to use standardized or localized instruments made, the next step in the development of the data-gathering effort is to establish an "Intended Outcomes/Expected Results versus Means of Assessment Matrix" (Figure 2) to coordinate the assessment process. The design of such a matrix will insure that all intended outcomes/expected results are examined by at least one means of assessment. It is important to understand that the field of assessment is at this time, and for the foreseeable future, more of an art than a science. That is to say, the means of assessment at our disposal are considerably less than perfect and, in order to compensate for their relative inadequacies, it is important that multiple means be utilized to access each expected outcome or result.

Once the matrix is completed, the responsibility for each means of assessment will need to be established and documented in a chart or matrix similar to that shown in Figure 3.

These actions will lead naturally to questions regarding centralization versus decentralization of assessment support and information. This issue, though seemingly straightforward, has a number of perspectives relating to campus politics. While a persuasive case can be made for centralized logistical support for assessment from a component such as institutional research, the case for a centralized clearinghouse for assessment results is less readily accepted. The basic position regarding centralization versus decentralization can be restated by noting that decentralization of assessment procedures is politically more attractive, in that results are not available to the central administration. However, it is considerably more costly in terms of both out-of-pocket cost and effort on the part of the faculty—and is simply less likely to take place. On the other hand, centralization of logistical support and the establishment of a clearinghouse for assessment results can easily be justified from the standpoint of cost, reduction of the burden on the faculty, and easy access for accreditation purposes. However, care must be taken that the availability of data logistically supported from a central source, such as the institutional research component, does not lead to abuses of the decision-making power from the top down within an institution.

Ultimately, once the assessment plan is assembled and the instrumentation prepared, assessment activities will be initiated at the institution. One can expect these activities to be relatively uneven in their first iteration, and it will be unlikely that adequate coverage of all expected results by means of assessment will transpire for the first several years. It is more important for the institution to begin the trial implementation of its assessment procedures and refine them over a period of time than for the institution to attempt the "perfect" initial implementation.

The Institutional Planner Role

The next most likely role to be served by an institutional researcher is that of institutional planner. However, as the role of assessment data gatherer calls for the technical and logistical skills of the institutional researcher, the role of institutional planner requires a degree of organizational capability and interpersonal relations skills beyond that sometimes found in practitioners of our profession.

In implementation of the institutional planner role, it is essential to realize from the outset that the planning required for assessing institutional effectiveness is results or outcomes related, as opposed to means or resource oriented. Many campuses have relatively sophisticated and quite capable planning mechanisms which focus upon the processes of acquiring and allocating resources to support institutional operations such as teaching, research, etc.; but the institutional planner role focuses upon the results of the institution's efforts rather than these processes. As an example of the difference between these two perspectives on planning, the process- or means-oriented planner would be concerned with the addition of a faculty member to the English Department, whereas the outcomes- or results-oriented planner would focus upon whether students completing a degree at the institution could write a coherent paragraph.

In addition to this recognition of the different focus of assessing institutional effectiveness, there are at least four key issues or challenges facing the individual in the institutional planner role:

1. Establishment of a usable statement of purpose for the institution. Most institutional statements of purpose, mission, philosophy, etc. have been somewhat similar to "Mother, Home, and Apple Pie." This circumstance has existed for a number of reasons, including a genuine lack of focus on the part of many

INTENDED DEPARTMENTAL OR PROGRAM OUTCOMES/EXPECTED RESULTS	MEANS OF ASSESSMENT							
	Attitudinal Means			Cognitive Means		Behavioral Means	
	Graduating Student Questionnaire	Alumni Questionnaire	Employer Survey	Departmental Comprehensive Examination	Licensure Examination	Reports of Activities	Departmental Performance Examination
Baccalaureate Degree Program in Accounting Graduates will be:							
Outcome A. Well prepared for their first position.							
Criteria 1. 90% will pass 3 of 4 parts of CPA on first testing.					X		
2. 80% will "agree" or "strongly agree" that "I feel well prepared" on Graduating Study Questionnaire.	X						
3. Employers will rate Accounting Graduates at an average of 8.5 on 10-point scale.			X				
Outcome B. Employed upon graduation.							
Criteria 1. 85% registered with Placement Service will receive job offer.						X	
2. 80% of graduating students will report employment.	X						
3. 90% of alumni will report employment in directly related field.		X					
Outcome C. Comfortable in a microcomputer accounting environment.							
Criteria 1. All will complete major micro-computer accounting project.							X
2. 90% will "agree" or "strongly agree" with statement that "I feel comfortable using micro-computing accounting procedures."	X						

Figure 2. Intended outcomes/expected results vs means of assessment matrix.

MEANS OF ASSESSMENT	Attitudinal			Cognitive		Behavioral	
	Graduating Student Questionnaire	Alumni Questionnaire	Employer Satisfaction Survey	Departmental Comprehensive Examination	Major Field Achievement Test (MFAT)	Licensure Examination Results	Job Offer Rates	Departmental Performance Examination
RESPONSIBILITY FOR GATHERING ASSESSMENT DATA								
Institutional Research Component	X	X	X					
Testing Center					X*			
English Department	*			X				
Accounting Department						X		X
Placement Service							X**	
Music Department								X

*History, Engineering, Mathematics
**All Programs

Figure 3. Identification of responsibilities for means of assessment.

institutions and a desire not to offend any constituency by attempting to be "all things to all people." Implementation of institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment requires that these statements of purpose be action-oriented guides to the functioning of the institution. The reason for this is that institutions must be able to verify the accomplishment of their goals.

2. Establishment of departmental program statements of expected results or intentions. The institutional planner will be responsible for seeing that the necessary statements are established within the institution (probably in departments and programs) to support accomplishment of the institutional statement of purpose. In this capacity, the institutional planner will necessarily need to "map back" departmental/program statements of expected results to ensure that all elements of the institutional level of statement of purpose are supported by one or more units within the institution.
3. Ensuring the use of assessment results. Probably the most difficult aspect of implementation of institutional effectiveness relates to documentation of the use of the assessment results. Seeing that such results are utilized will become one of the primary tasks of the institutional planner.
4. Establishing the campus relationship of ends-oriented (expected results) to means-oriented (resources) planning. While ends- and means-oriented planning are obviously related, the institutional planner will ultimately need to address the specific nature of that relationship on his/her campus. Means- or resource-oriented planning needs the credibility gained through assessment of outcomes or results while ends-oriented planning needs a relationship to resource allocation to ensure that desirable results are supported.

While these challenges are substantially less technical in nature than those of the assessment data-gatherer role, they are nonetheless substantial and constitute nearly a full-time position on some campuses.

Conclusion regarding the Role of Institutional Research

As indicated above, implementation of institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment can be, for the institutional researcher, the proverbial "insurmountable opportunity." It is important for each of us to grasp that within the challenge of this implementation are roles which indeed represent opportunities for professional development. The choice for most institutional researchers whose campuses are implementing institutional effectiveness or outcomes assessment is which role to seek or accept.

William Faulkner (1950) wrote, "I decline to accept the end of man. . . . I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail." To paraphrase Faulkner, institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment provide the institutional research officer not merely with an opportunity to endure within his or her institution but, in some cases, to prevail.

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